

Soldiers from Minni Minawi's Sudan Liberation Army faction board one of their "technicals" in Umm Baru, North Darfur.



FIRST RESPONSE

"I would define the objective of transformational diplomacy this way: To work with our many partners around the world to build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that will respond to the needs of their people—and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system."

—Secretary Rice, January 18, 2006

There are few better places in the world to see the potential for transformational diplomacy than in El Fasher, a dusty frontier garrison town with only a few paved roads and scant amenities that serves as the capital of Sudan's North Darfur state. For the past year, a team of diplomats from the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum and the Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization has been working along with US Agency for International Development field staff to stabilize the political, security and humanitarian crisis and its impact on the people of Darfur.

CRS is represented by members of its Active Response Corps and Standby

Response Corps, composed of first responders who support stabilization and reconstruction efforts in conflict-affected regions. Corps members are Foreign Service and Civil Service personnel who specialize in unconventional field missions, often in remote and hostile regions, to support embassy and Department initiatives.

The need for a diplomatic presence in North Darfur arose in the aftermath of the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in Abuja, Nigeria, on May 5, 2006. The agreement sought to end Darfur's political and economic marginalization by the authorities in Khartoum and was initially signed by the government of Sudan and one of three rebel

TRANSFORMATIONAL DIPLOMACY IN DARFUR | BY EYTHAN SONTAG AND KEITH MINES

PHOTOGRAPHS: (ABOVE) EYTHAN SONTAG; (OPPOSITE PAGE TOP) CHARLIE WINTERMEYER; (BOTTOM): KEITH MINES



Left: School tents at the Oure Cassoni refugee camp in eastern Chad wear out in three to four months because of the constant sand and wind. Below: Author Eythan Sontag, front left, sits with African Union peacekeepers and Justice and Equality Movement rebels in Jebel Moon to discuss the peace process.



factions. Persuading the outlying rebel groups, which have proliferated since the agreement was signed, to join the peace process remains a key diplomatic priority. U.S. efforts have also focused on improving political conditions to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and facilitate the return of more than 2 million internally displaced persons.

To help achieve these objectives, the Department's Bureau of African Affairs and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives provided funds for Peace Secretariats—also called DPA Implementation Offices—in Khartoum and El Fasher. A small ARC team developed these secretariats into centers for dispensing information about the peace agreement and for coordinating, hosting and encouraging activities related to the peace process. The Peace Secretariats also provide office space, logistical support and communications assistance to those

rebel factions that signed the peace agreement or the Declaration of Commitment, an agreement to commit to the Darfur Peace Agreement, to help those groups transition from military organizations to political entities.

In addition to establishing the Peace Secretariats, the ARC was tasked with creating a forward platform in Darfur where U.S. government officials could live and work. CRS worked with the Bureau of African Affairs and the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum to establish two residences/work facilities on the outskirts of El Fasher. The houses were refurbished, fortified to meet security standards, furnished and equipped with very small amateur terminal (VSAT) technology to provide Internet connectivity. The outpost is supported by a seven-person field staff of local drivers, custodians and interpreters who were recruited and hired by ARC and embassy officers.

FLUID SITUATIONS

ARC members adapted to the fluid circumstances as the mission and security conditions in Darfur evolved. To help facilitate the peace process and ensure the protection of millions of displaced Darfurians, ARC officers served as U.S. observers to the African Union Mission in Sudan Cease-fire Commission, which monitors, reviews and reports on violations of the peace agreement. In this capacity, they conduct outreach to rebel signatory and nonsignatory factions alike, looking for common ground that will reinforce the cessation of hostilities.

ARC officers have participated in hands-on missions to such places as the mountainous Jebel Marra and Jebel Moon areas to engage rebel movements, gain first-hand information about armed confrontations and, where appropriate, participate in African Union or UN mediation efforts.



Children from one of the local internally displaced persons camps collecting firewood and fodder pass in front of an African Union Mission in Sudan camp.

In addition to cultivating a wide network of contacts within the UN, humanitarian communities, AMIS, civil society and local government, ARC and embassy officers continue to assess the progress of UN support to AMIS. The ARC presence in Darfur has provided ground-level visibility and reporting of policy implementation, including progress on the peace agreement, for decisionmakers in Khartoum, Washington, New York and other diplomatic centers.

As one of the U.S. government's highest foreign policy priorities and the subject of intense public and media focus, the situation in Darfur has attracted numerous high-level delegations, ranging from presidential special envoys to movie stars to congressional delegations. ARC officers have played a key role in coordinating and receiving these visitors to the field, providing briefings, arranging meetings and organizing security measures.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Department's El Fasher presence has also provided enhanced outreach opportunities for the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum. The embassy public affairs officer recently made the first public diplomacy trip to El Fasher in many years, visiting the University of El Fasher, the local radio station and the town's only museum.

For six months, the ARC and SRC also deployed officers to Chad, serving primarily in the eastern part of the country bordering Sudan. These officers met regularly with the UN High Commission for Refugees and nongovernmental organization officials supporting Darfuri refugees and internally displaced persons, both at the hub of operations in Abeche and at the many refugee camps and displaced person sites in eastern Chad. ARC and SRC personnel also engaged Sudanese

rebels located in Chad to reinforce U.S. policy points and escorted delegations from Congress, USAID and the Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

CRS and the ARC, in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum, the Bureau of African Affairs, USAID and other partners, continue their work in Darfur as an example of innovative and flexible transformational diplomacy in action, where bringing the right assets and people together at the right time may help make a difference in this troubled region.

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Left: Camps in eastern Chad fill quickly with young Darfur refugees. Below: Active Response Corps officer Eythan Sontag, second from left, and Standby Response Corps officer Keith Mines, far right, meet with the head of the Legislative Council in El Fasher, North Darfur.



ON SHORT NOTICE By AMBASSADOR JOHN E. HERBST

In my 10 months as coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization, S/CRS has experienced inevitable challenges, but also tremendous progress. The office was created to organize the U.S. government's reconstruction and stabilization efforts for countries that have fallen into chaos, and build the civilian planning and response tools to staff these operations.

An important part of what we are trying to do is create a civilian surge capability. To that end, the members of our Active and Standby Response Corps are truly on the cutting edge of transformational diplomacy. They can be deployed on short notice to unconventional, challenging environments. And they have begun to do so in Sudan's Darfur region, eastern Chad, Lebanon, Haiti, Kosovo, Iraq and Nepal.

We must also draw on the expertise of the American public, which is why the President called for the creation of a Civilian Reserve Corps in his most recent State of the Union address. Secretary Rice is leading this effort, and tasked my office with standing the CRC up. The CRC will expand the pool of civilian experts such as law enforcement specialists, public administrators and engineers who can support critical areas of reconstruction and stabilization work.

To get our civilians on the ground, our government must support them with proper planning, coordinated operations and training. We have agreed on an inter-agency management system that will be used to address future reconstruction and stabilization crises. As part of this, we have developed a planning process and an

interagency conflict assessment tool that are now in use for U.S. planning efforts for Kosovo. In Haiti, a team from multiple U.S. agencies in Washington and the field designed an innovative initiative to enhance security and economic opportunities in one of Port-au-Prince's most troubled neighborhoods.

Weak and failing states pose critical national security challenges. By better organizing how we respond and ensuring we have the necessary civilian resources to do so, we give ourselves the best chance for success in future crises. We owe it to our country and to those around the world struggling to emerge from conflict. ■

The author is the coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization.

